

IDEAS AT *Work*

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

'Showcase' looks good but has major bugs

Not long ago in this column I raved about Dan Bricklin's "Demo Program" for personal computers that allows you to take "snapshots" of any computer screen and then display them like a photographic slide show on your computer's monitor. The program simply records screen images on disk and allows you to play them back at will. What really impressed me about the Demo Program is that it can simulate the running of actual programs, so you can re-run sequences for training purposes.

Now, from a tiny firm called RMS Technology Corp. in Canby, Ore., comes "Showcase" — a program with slightly different features. A few of its functions are more impressive than the Demo Program. Unfortunately, it bombed during my testing, so I was unable to verify everything it claims to do.

Nonetheless, because Showcase offers such great potential for corporate trainers, computer managers and executives who regularly give presentations, it's worth comparing head-to-head with the Demo Program.

Here are the similarities and differences:

- ✓ The Demo Program allows you to capture screen images, amend each one, and add different colored notes explaining each "slide." Showcase also allows you to capture screen images and add different colored notes, but there is no way to edit or amend the slides.

- ✓ The Demo Program allows you to build screen images from scratch, and to simulate programs that don't yet exist! This is a wonderful feature that software developers and programmers will find useful, but it might not be important to business users who are not technically oriented. Showcase does not offer the feature.

- ✓ Showcase can show key-

strokes as they are being entered and actually run your applications software — accounting programs or technical programs that need detailed training, for example — during a demo. This makes the presentation more realistic. The Demo Program does not have this

feature. But it should be noted that this feature did not function properly when used with WordPerfect, the popular word processing program. When a representative for Showcase was asked about the defect, he conceded that this feature did not work with all programs, notably Lotus 1-2-3 as well.



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- ✓ Showcase has clear and simple documentation, as opposed to a very technical and difficult-to-understand manual that comes with the Demo Program.

- ✓ Finally, how do the prices compare? The Demo Program is \$74.95 and Showcase lists for \$142.50. Considering the fact that the Demo Program was released about a year ago and is relatively bug free, it seems like a better deal than the brand new, problem-ridden Showcase program.

When I originally evaluated the Demo Program, I concluded that although it could be very useful in many business situations, it is too difficult to learn by most non-technical business people. If, on the other hand, you had someone in your office who could set it up for you, it was highly recommended.

Now, while the Showcase program offers a better manual and greater ease-of-use, it still requires a technical expert to set it up in order to work around the bugs. So, until the program's authors issue an improved version, I suggest that you steer clear of the more expensive Showcase program.

However, don't rule it out for later consideration. It might be the better choice if you don't need technical assistance to use it.

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